

University of the Third Age Plettenberg Bay

Newsletter March 2023

Dear Members

Our AGM on the 15th March went well and we welcome Lorna van der Merwe as a new committee member. Please let us know if you would like to join her!

Thank you to those who have paid their 2023 membership subscription fees. Membership runs from 1 January to 31 December. Please note that those members who have not renewed their subscription will be deleted from our database at the end of March, in compliance with the Protection of Personal Information Act ('POPI', Act 4 of 2013).

You may (not) have wondered why we ask you to indicate your subjects of interest when you join or renew your Plett u3a membership. As you'll see below, this enables us to better understand what will and won't make most of our members happy in terms of programme planning. As always, if you have any suggestions in this regard please let us have them.

We hope to grow a collection of interest groups that cater for members' particular interests. These 'focused' 'groups can provide the relevant interested members so much more in addition to our 'general' weekly Monday documentary viewings and Wednesday talks and outings. As with anything else in life, what you put into making the interest groups a success (either as a leader or member) is what you will get out of them – but with interest (pun intended).

We have many outings planned for the months ahead and we look forward to seeing you there, as well at our other events!

Best wishes
Plett u3a committee

Welcome

A big welcome to our new members: Fiona Allenberg, Ria Baiocchi, Sharon Hindle, Gail and Robin Kuper, Pat and John Lankester, Joan Wentzel and Jill Whittaker.

Plett u3a events programme

The calendar of upcoming events is sent as a separate document together with the newsletter. Overviews of future events are included in the calendar document. More detailed information regarding future talks and outings is sent to all members as 'Upcoming events' email notifications about two weeks prior to the event. A reminder is sent approximately 24 hours before the event. Outings need to be booked through u3aplett@gmail.com.

The programme calendar covers the upcoming next two months. However, here are some planned outings beyond May, in case you want to pencil the information into your diary. Please note that these are events in the pipeline, so they are subject to change.

14 June – Wine outing to a local estate

27 & 28 June (Tue & Wed) – Two flower walks above Natures Valley with guides from the Natures Valley Trust. Limited to 12 persons per morning.

Other outings planned, but no dates available as yet.

- Walk at Kwendalo
- Walk with Cape Nature
- Keurbooms Ferry – repeat trip in October
- Rock Art of Sedgefield

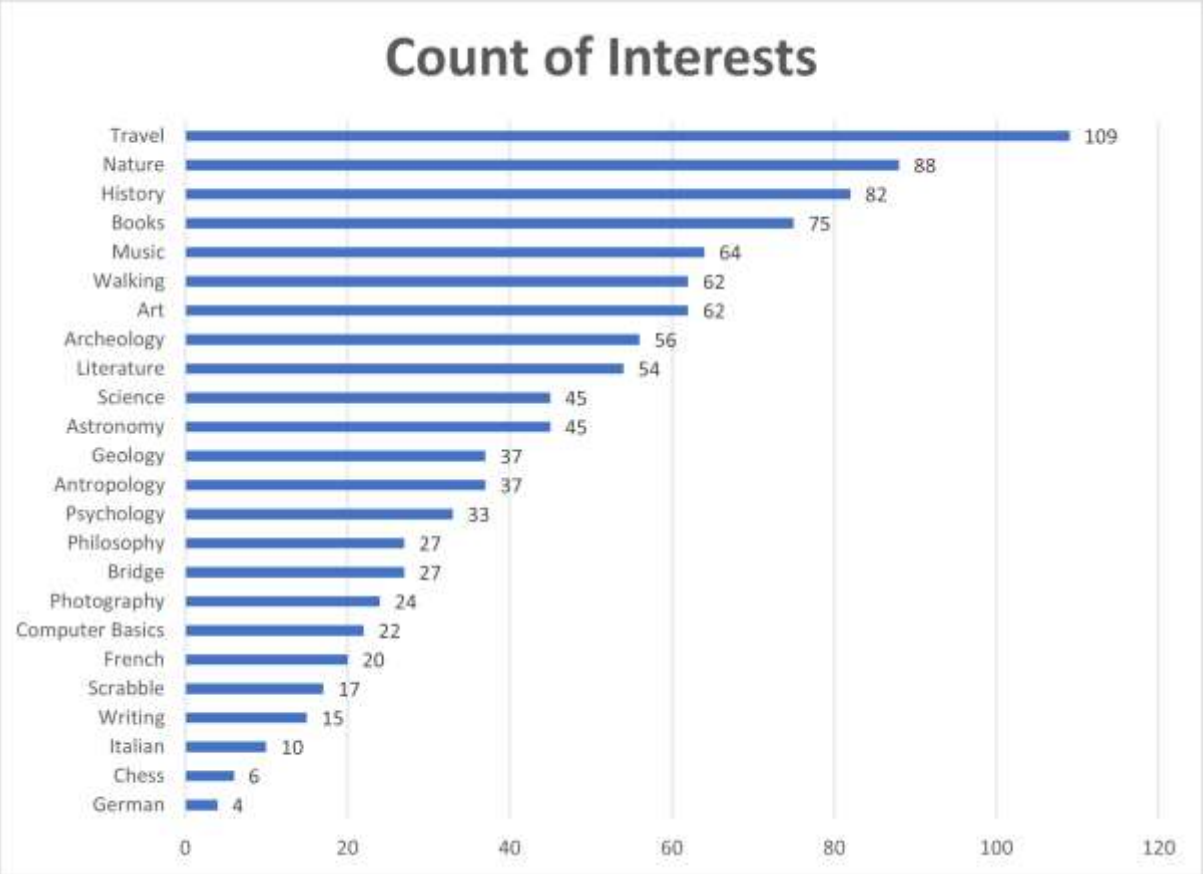
Although this has nothing to do with Plett u3a, history buffs may want to know that Plett's Fourth Watercourse History Festival will be held 27-29 April. Book tickets for FESTIVAL PASS: The Fourth Watercourse History Festival in Plettenberg Bay (quicket.co.za)

Annual General Meeting, 15 March 2023

Our AGM was well attended. The keynote speaker, renowned astronomer Case Rijsdijk, spoke about 'The very early universe' and addressed the following questions: Where have we come from? Where are we going? How do we know? (See the summary below under 'Talks' for more information.)

Your interests

When you completed your membership (renewal) form we asked you to tick subjects of interest to you. Below are the results, as at 15 March.



Unsurprisingly for Plettonians, travel ranks highest, followed by nature.

So what? Well, in terms of our constitution, the aim of Plett u3a is 'to provide stimulating programmes conducive to learning and social interaction'. It's a given that you can't please all of the people all of the time. However, if we are to organise programmes that meet the needs of most of our members most of the time, we first need to know what they like. Next, the tricky part, is to try to meet those needs in terms of programme planning.

The committee is planning for the future based on the above information. There is much that can be done - not just by the committee members, but also by every member - to create a solid foundation of a variety of Plett u3a activities that address most of our members' interests.

How are we doing so far? If we consider only the top ten interests in the graph (Travel to Science), here is how we are currently addressing your interests. Travel is covered by Monday documentaries (such as Francesco's Mediterranean Voyage, Joanna Lumley in Greece) as well as monthly outings (eg. the Sutherland trip). When choosing documentary films, plays and talks we try to focus on the most popular subjects, such as nature (for example, *Earth Flight*), history (Prof Rufus Fear's *Great*

courses in history, Peter Terry's play on World War I*),* music (Maria Callas), art (Simon Schama's *Power of Art*) and archaeology (*Ancient Britain*). Outings are also planned, where possible, around subjects of interest, such as nature (eg. flower identification walks, Equine Librium) or art (eg. Carla's Masks, Robbie Leggat's bronze sculpture pouring).

In terms of existing and newly-formed interest groups, we have the long-standing **French conversation group**, which unfortunately is closed to new members. We would like to create a second French group to meet the demand. Attempts have been made to connect to the Plett Italian community to establish an **Italian conversation group**, but these have so far been unsuccessful. Please help us find people willing to lead these (and other) language groups.

The **Science interest group** is devoted solely to that subject. Literature is partly being addressed by the very newly formed **Poetry interest group** (more details supplied below). '**Books'** is a deliberately broad subject, as they in themselves address every known subject, but some people tend to prefer either fiction or non-fiction. Those interested in 'books' will need to decide what they specifically want to pursue under that broad banner within an interest group. A few months ago Maurice Robin spoke about his book *Diamonds* and Des Lindberg shared the highlights of his life with Dawn from his book *Every Day Is An Opening Night - Our Journey Together.*

Walking rates as the sixth most common interest. Unfortunately we currently have no activities or plans in this regard, but would love to hear of someone willing to organise regular walks.

It is not physically possible to list every topic of potential interest on the membership form, so there will always be gaps in this respect. David Yuill, a former professor of architecture, is keen to start an **Architecture interest group.** Please contact David if you are interested in joining this group (dwby@mweb.co.za).

The essence of u3a movements around the world is the pursuit of interests achieved through volunteers within the u3a community, where all members enjoy equal status. If you want to share your interests with like-minded individuals please offer to get those people together on a regular basis so that you can make things happen for yourself and others. The newly-formed Poetry group (see below) is a good example. Please share your thoughts with us on how we can best achieve our objectives.

Interest group activities: past and future

Science interest group

The first post-Covid meeting of the Science group was held on the 8th of March. The topic was *The design and operation of mechanical pendulum clocks.* Henry illustrated this talk on his new hobby not only with a PowerPoint presentation with embedded videos, but also with a three-dimensional model of a clockwork, actual clocks and various bits and pieces that make up the inner workings of a clock. Most of these were handed around for closer inspection, including a wooden time-keeping device used by ancient Egyptians. Spring-driven clocks appeared during the 15th century, whereafter clock making flourished. The next development in accuracy occurred after 1656 with the invention of the pendulum clock by Christiaan Huygens. The pendulum is a swinging device used to regulate the movements of a clock. Henry demonstrated how pendulum clocks work, in terms of the

mathematical analysis of the pendulum equation from Newton's laws of motion, as well as aspects of gear design and showed how these work together in the design of a clock's time keeping motion.

Looking ahead, Henry would like to move from presentations to more active participation by the Science group members. He welcomes any ideas you have in this regard. Another idea of his is to set up a panel of members with knowledge on mobile phones, computers, TV's Netflix, routers, wifi, inverters and ask members to come in with their questions/devices in the hope that some member of the panel can help them. Questions can be simple as 'How do I change my screensaver?' or complicated (which hopefully someone can answer). If this resonates with you, please contact Henry (henry.timme@gmail.com).

Poetry interest group

For those interested in poetry: a monthly informal poetry gathering will be held at Chrissy Hay's home every second Thursday of the month from 10:00 to 12:30, starting on the 11th May 2023. The first poetry meeting will be led by Ruth Everson (a poet) to discuss the format of future meetings. Ruth led a Johannesburg u3a poetry group. For more information please email christinehay@worldonline.co.za.

Past activities

Francesco's Mediterranean Voyage, a 12-part BBC Television documentary series, was first aired in 2008. The Venetian architect Francesco da Mosto follows the historical Venetian trading route from Venice to Istanbul, sailing as a crew member of the yacht *Black Swan*.

Monday 6 March: Episodes 9 and 10

E9 – Crete

First stop is the abandoned island of Spinalonga, where a former Venetian fortress was used as a leper colony until 1957. After docking at Cretan capital Iraklion, Francesco explores the underground caves where Zeus is said to have been born. Later he visits the palace of Knossos, centre of the Minoan civilization and reputedly home to King Minos and the legendary Minotaur. Nearby he tries his hand at the ancient Cretan art of pot-making. He attends a riotous traditional Greek wedding feast with 1 500 guests, returning at dawn just before the boat leaves Crete.





E10 – The Dodecanese

Rhodes, the largest of the Dodecanese islands, was home to the legendary crusader knights of St John. Next stop is the Turquoise Coast off Turkey, a breeding ground of loggerhead turtles that are regularly fed by fishermen. Near the town of Dalyan, Francesco climbs up to the ancient rock-cut Lycian tombs, which were deliberately carved high in the mountains so the spirits of the dead had less far to travel to heaven. On the island of Patmos, in the Cave of the Apocalypse, St John the Divine (author of the Book of Revelation in the Bible) is said to have experienced his revelations that foretell the end of the world and the final struggle between God and Satan.

Monday 13 and 20 March: Episodes 11 and 12

Due to technical problems (for which we apologise) on 13 March the last episodes had to be shown a week later and the monthly programme was moved out accordingly.

E11 · The Dardanelles

After entering the Strait of the Dardanelles, gateway to the east, their first stop is at the haunting beaches of Gallipoli - scene of one of the worst massacres of the First World War. It was here that the Anzac forces of New Zealand and Australia were decimated as, alongside British troops, they tried to retake the Dardanelles.



After a very bumpy bus ride inland, Francesco arrives at the city of Edirne, which boasts Turkey's finest - and largest - mosque. The incredible acoustics of the giant dome are demonstrated by a local imam with the biggest pair of lungs in town. Francesco takes part in Edirne's most popular sport: oil wrestling. Competitors are naked, except for skin-tight leather trousers and are covered in olive oil. Before the final lap to Istanbul they stop at Bursa, birthplace of the doner kebab.



E12 · Istanbul (final)

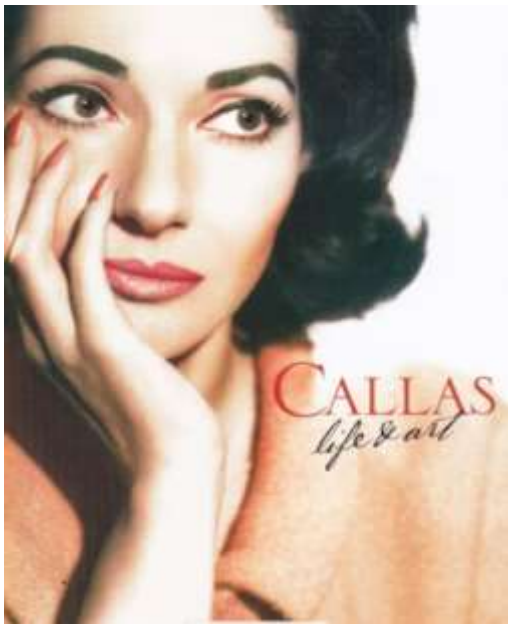
Franceso reaches Istanbul, the final stop of his marathon voyage from Venice following the trading routes of the Venetian empire. Istanbul straddles the Bosphorus as well as two continents and it has been the home of both Christian and Islamic civilisations.



First stop is the Palace of Topkapi - centre of power for the Ottoman empire. Most haunting of all is the palace harem, a prison to the sultan's many concubines. Beneath the city is a vast network of underground tunnels dating back more than a thousand years. Donning hard hat and waders, Francesco enters one of the huge underground cisterns. Two giant heads of Medusa lie abandoned in the water. In Istanbul's Grand Bazaar, one of the world's biggest undercover markets, Francesco learns the secrets of the carpet trade and tries to sell a Turkish carpet. After a final celebration aboard the *Black Swan*, Francesco's journey ends



Monday 27 February: Maria Callas – life and art



Maria Callas (1923-1977), an American-born Greek soprano, was one of the most renowned and influential opera singers of the 20th century. Her fame lay not only in her musical brilliance and wide-ranging voice, but also in the dramatic intensity she brought to her roles. Her musical and dramatic talents led to her being hailed as La Divina ("the Divine one").

Her life is told by those who had first-hand knowledge of her, like her long-time stage partner Di Stefano (Italian tenor), conductor Giullini, director Zefirelli and accompanist Sutherland. Their colourful descriptions of this temperamental and uniquely talented woman are interesting, sometimes funny, and very often moving.

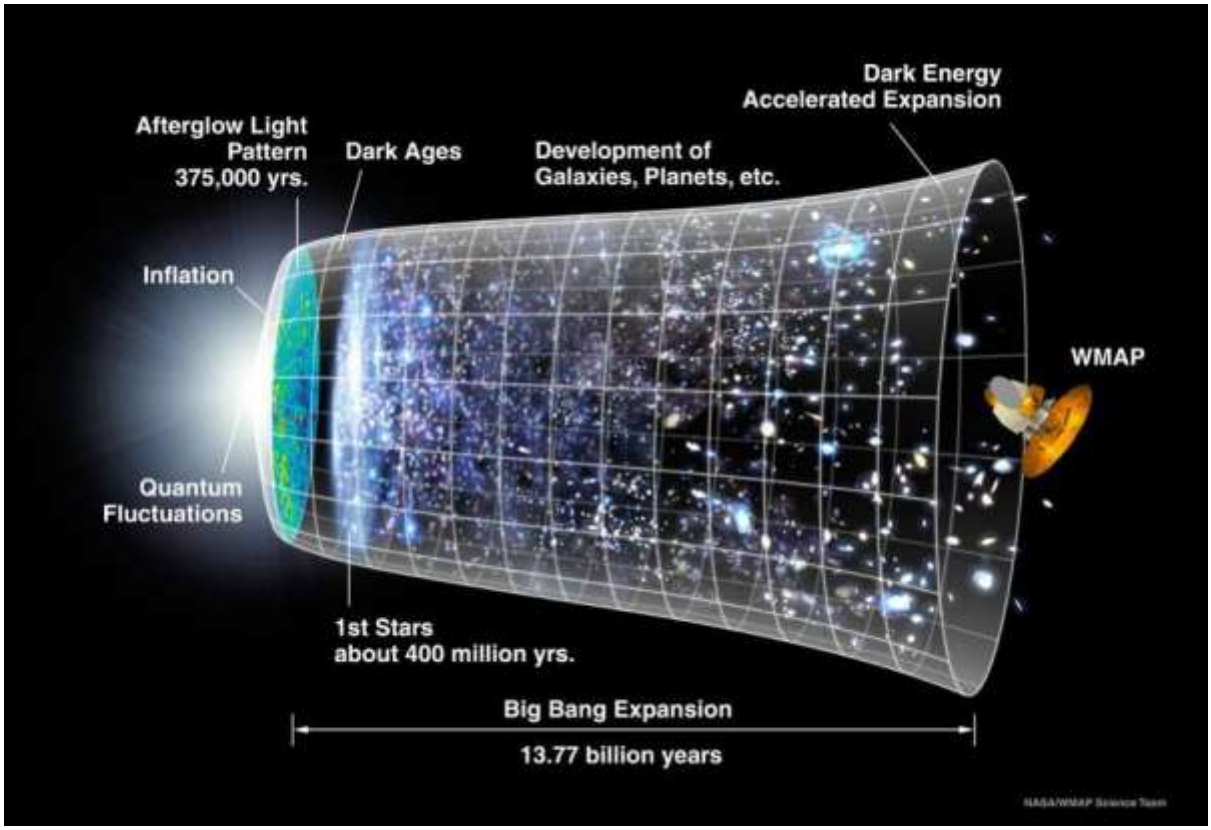
Her voice started failing her when she was in her 40s. As the mistress of Aristotle Onassis she almost gave up her career. She lived for about three years after the death of Onassis, who had abandoned her to marry Jackie Kennedy. She died alone in Paris aged 53 of a heart attack - a depressed and broken woman.
She is still one of classical music's best-selling vocalists.

Talks

Wednesday 15 March 2023: Case Rijsdijk – The very early universe

Case (past president and member of the Astronomical Society of Southern Africa, the Royal Society of South Africa and the South African Institute of Physics) gave a fascinating overview of the very early universe. The Big Bang theory of the universe proposes that the universe expanded explosively from an extremely dense and hot state, and continues to expand today. Calculations have dated this Big Bang to approximately 13.7 billion years ago.

However, it took some time (perhaps a few hundred million years post Big Bang) before the first sources of light would start to form, ending the cosmic dark ages. Exactly what the universe's first light (ie. stars that fused the existing hydrogen atoms into more helium) and also the structure prior to the first light, looked like, and exactly when the first stars formed is not known. Likewise, current knowledge as to what preceded the Big Bang can only be suggested via theories and models of particle physics, such as the Grand Unified Theory (GUT) and the Standard Model. It is hoped that telescopes, such as the Webb telescope, and other 'time machines ' that examine particle physics, such as the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), will help answer some of the fundamental questions concerning, the deep structure of space and time.



The timeline of our observable Universe's history, where the observable portion expands to larger and larger sizes as we move forward in time away from the Big Bang. The leftover glow from the Big Bang is still observable today. NASA / WMAP SCIENCE TEAM

Outings

Wednesday 29 March 2023: Bronze pouring at Robbie Leggat's foundry, Bronze Fields Farm










Robbie Leggat's life-sized sculpture of a dolphin and calf in Plett's traffic circle on Main Street is an iconic landmark. It is rare to find an artist who casts his own sculptures and to be able to observe this process from start to finish. Robbie captures the essence of the birds and animals he depicts in his exceptional works.

During our tour of his foundry Robbie explained how the original sculpture is made from a mixture of mixture of microcrystalline waxes, which is then coated in a layer of silicone rubber. Once the rubber has hardened it is encased in a fibreglass jacket. When the mould is completed, a wax copy is poured inside it, creating a hollow wax copy of the original sculpture. A ceramic mould is then built up in layers using different grades of ceramic sand. The ceramic mould is then turned upside down in a kiln and the wax is melted out leaving a cavity into which the molten bronze will be poured. The bronze ingots are melted in a furnace to a temperature of 1200 degrees Centigrade before the molten metal is poured into the ceramic moulds. Once the bronze has cooled the ceramic mould is broken to reveal the bronze casting – in this case a pangolin.





Committee		
Chairman	Jan Hough	084-674-4235
Secretary	Lorna van der Merwe	082-784-9903
Facebook	Beth Hackland	072-266-1821
Finance & DVD library	Ian Hogan	083-261-5861
Marketing & communications	Felicity (Flick) Grube	082-557-7779
Membership	Peter Grube	083-381-5929
Newsletter	Felicity (Flick) Grube	082-557-7779
Outings	Beth Hackland	072-266-1821
Programme coordinator	Lynette Timme	079-313-9641
Special interest groups		
Bridge for beginners	Chrissy Hay	083-648-0306
Computer basics	Peter Grube	083-381-5929
Poetry group	Chrissy Hay	083-648-0306
Science group	Henry Timme	078-877-5829
French conversation (full)	Merle Decot	
General enquiries	u3aplett@gmail.com	